

of time to debate flag burning. I don't know when the last flag was burned in my State of Massachusetts, but we have plenty of time to deal with that. We have had plenty of time on the Federal marriage amendment. But we don't want to deal with an increase in the minimum wage that affects 15 million people.

There you are. There are the priorities. It could not be clearer. So we know where we stand. We are always asked how we stand on different issues: What do you believe in?

We will have a very good opportunity this morning to indicate what we believe in. That is basically the framework of this issue.

Mr. President, how much time have I used?

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ISAKSON). Thirty-four minutes.

Mr. KENNEDY. I yield myself 4 more minutes.

Mr. President, this letter is from the heads of 33 major religious groups calling on Congress to do its moral duty to raise the minimum wage. This is the Let Justice Roll, which is an organization of faith and community leaders:

As leaders of our respective faith communities, we call on Congress to raise the Federal minimum wage in the 109th session. For too long, the ranks of the working poor have grown in this country. For too long, low-wage workers have been unable to support themselves and their families, even though they work several jobs, trying to make ends meet. Poverty has become a disease, striking at the very heart of the United States, attacking the most vulnerable, even as the wealthy few continue to accumulate far more than their reasonable share. It is unacceptable that such a state of affairs be allowed to continue, as year after year, Congress fails to pass an increase in the Federal minimum wage.

Prophetic voices through the ages have called upon their nations to show justice to the poorest and most vulnerable in society. The Prophet Amos exhorts the people of Israel, "Hate evil and love good, and establish justice. Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Then, and now, the assembled people of God are called upon to establish justice for low-wage workers, whose cries are so often heard across our land.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the letter and the signers be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN,

November 7, 2005.

DEAR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS: As leaders of our respective faith communities, we call on Congress to raise the Federal minimum wage in the 109th session. For too long, the ranks of the working poor have grown in this country. For too long, low-wage workers have been unable to support themselves and their families, even though they work several jobs, trying to make ends meet. Poverty has become a disease, striking at the very heart of the United States, attacking the most vulnerable, even as the wealthy few continue to accumulate far more than their reasonable share. It is unacceptable that such a state of affairs be allowed to continue, as year after year, Congress fails to pass an increase in the Federal minimum wage.

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The situation among America's minimum wage workers is particularly dire. A minimum wage employee—making \$5.15 an hour, working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, earns \$10,700 a year—\$5,000 below the Federal poverty line for a family of three. The real value of the minimum wage today is nearly \$4.00 less than it was in 1968. Indeed, in order for the minimum wage to have the same purchasing power as it did in 1968, the Federal minimum would have to be raised to more than \$9.00. This situation is unconscionable, as the wealth of our Nation continues to be built on the backs of the working poor.

In his *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, our modern-day prophet, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., says, "There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we now have the resources to get rid of it." It is time to heed the call of the prophets, both ancient and modern. It is time to recognize that a minimum wage should be a fair, just, and living wage.

Signed,

Kim Bobo, Executive Director of Interfaith Worker Justice; The Reverend Dr. Robert W. Edgar, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ; The Reverend C. Welton Gaddy, President of The Interfaith Alliance and the Interfaith Alliance Foundation; The Most Reverend Frank T. Griswold, Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church; The Reverend Dr. Stan Hastey, Executive Director of the Alliance of Baptists; James E. Hug, S.J., President of Center of Concern; The Reverend Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); The Reverend Timothy McDonald III and the Reverend Dr. Robert P. Shine, Sr., Chair and Vice-Chair of African American Ministers in Action.

Mary Ellen McNish, General Secretary of the American Friends Service Committee; Bishop William B. Oden, Head of Communion and Ecumenical Officer of the United Methodist Church; Bishop Roy Riley, Chair of the Evangelical Lutheran Church Conference of Bishops; Rabbi David Saperstein, Director and Counsel of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism; Alexander Sharp, Executive Director of Protestants for the Common Good; The Reverend William G. Sinkford, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association; The Reverend John H. Thomas, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ; The Reverend Romal J. Tune, CEO of Clergy Strategic Alliances, LLC.

The Reverend Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); Rabbi Eric Yoffie, President of the Union for Reform Judaism; Scott D. Anderson, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Council of Churches; The Reverend John Boonstra, Executive Minister of the Washington State Association of Churches; The Reverend Albert G. Cohen, Executive Director of the Southern California Ecumenical

Council; The Reverend Stephen Copley, President of the Arkansas Interfaith Conference; The Reverend Dr. Barbara Dua, Executive Director of the New Mexico Conference of Churches; The Reverend Nancy Jo Kemper, Executive Director of the Kentucky Council of Churches.

David Lamarre-Vincent, Executive Director of the New Hampshire Council of Churches; David A. Leslie, Executive Director of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon; Marilyn P. Mecham, Executive of Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska; The Reverend J. George Reed, Executive Director of the North Carolina Council of Churches; The Reverend Dr. Stephen J. Sidorak, Jr., Executive Director of the Christian Conference of Connecticut; The Reverend C. Douglas Smith, Executive Director of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy; The Reverend Dennis Sparks, Executive Director of the West Virginia Council of Churches; The Reverend Sandra L. Strauss, Director of Public Advocacy of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches; The Reverend Rebecca Tollefson, Executive Director of the Ohio Council of Churches.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, when we asked people to sign on as citizen cosponsors of the Fair Minimum Wage Act, 1,000 religious leaders answered the call. They took a stand to say that minimum wage is a moral issue that must be addressed. They have come together from all denominations, all walks of life to send this important message.

I will take a couple more moments.

First, I remind my colleagues in the Senate that support for an increase in the minimum wage is going like a wildfire across the country. This chart indicates in red those States which have increased the minimum wage above the Federal Government minimum wage. Look at this: Arkansas and Illinois.

The States in yellow are those States where the minimum wage will likely be on the ballot this fall.

Illinois, Florida, North Carolina—red States—passed an increase in the minimum wage in both houses, but they have not been reconciled. North Carolina, Arkansas, the home of Wal-Mart, increased the minimum wage.

This is happening in the countryside. I remind the Senate again, with the failure to increase the minimum wage, what the impact has been on families and on the poor.

From 2000 to 2004, we failed to increase the minimum wage and 1.4 million more children have fallen into poverty. If we look at what has been happening to families, 5.4 million more Americans are in poverty over the last 4 years. This does not bring it up to 2006. This would continue to grow. It is 5.4 million now. The best estimate is we have 1.4 million more children who are now in poverty.

In terms of the industrialized nations of the world, this is what has happened: We have the highest child poverty rate in the industrialized world, and we haven't increased our minimum wage.

I remind my colleagues what has been happening in other countries.